

# *Program Transcripts*

For February 2014



IN  
**SEARCH**  
OF THE LORD'S WAY<sup>®</sup>



# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**February 2014**

## **FEBRUARY 2 – ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD**

One day, when your life is over, you must give account to God for how you've lived. God will judge each one from His teaching in the Scriptures. He will repay each one for how he has lived.

## **FEBRUARY 9 – FREEDOM IN CHRIST**

Paul said, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." Today we're going to take a serious look at what it means to be free in Christ.

## **FEBRUARY 16 – WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?**

When this life is over, we will look back at our lives wondering what we have done that mattered. Many spend their entire lives pursuing empty paths, but the one who is faithful to God pursues righteousness. What have you done?

## **FEBRUARY 23 – BE WISE**

Some define wisdom as the art of living successfully in life. The wisdom that comes from God, however, is the wisdom we most need. Wisdom begins with God and one's faith in Christ as Lord and Savior.

## Accountable to God

One day, when your life is over, you must give an account to God for how you've lived. Today, we're going to explore our accountability to God. Hebrews 4:12-13 says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account." The Lord gave us His Word not only to tell us of His grace and providence but also to teach us what He expects us to be. The Scriptures are living and active; they look deep into our hearts and souls to reveal what kind of people we really are. We can't hide from God, and one day we'll give an account for how we've lived.

In Matthew 25:14-30, the Lord Jesus tells the story of how a master dealt with three of his servants. He gave five talents or money to one, two talents to the second, and one talent to the third. The first two servants doubled their money and received the praise and blessing of the Lord, while the third servant hid his money in the ground. He was afraid of his master and thought it would please his master just to give him back what he had received. But the master rebuked him for being a wicked, lazy slave. Because he did nothing, he was thrown out and punished. In the same way each of us is accountable to our Lord for how we've served. Are you a faithful servant of the Lord?

Our reading today comes from the Epistle of Paul to the Romans 2:6-11. Here it speaks about God, and how that He "who will render to each person according to his deeds. To those who by perseverance and doing good, seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God." That's an important reading from the book of Romans.

The Scripture undeniably teaches that we are accountable to God. Hebrews 9:27 says, "it's appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." The Lord Jesus said, "he who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). Second Corinthians 5:10 simply says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." We will indeed give an account for ourselves to God.

So we ask the question, by what will we be judged? First, we'll be judged by the things that we say, and speak. The Lord said, "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37). Our words matter to God. We'll give account for lies, gossip, speaking evil of others, using God's name in vain, and for dirty jokes. Ephesians 5:4 says, "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving." We should use our voices to bless others. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Don't be fooled. You will give an account for your words.

Second, we'll be judged by how we think. The Lord said, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court" (Matthew 5:21-22). Again, the Lord said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Evil thoughts lead to evil deeds, and what is in your heart matters to God. God said, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:10). God knows what is in your heart and He will judge you for your ways.

Third, we'll be judged by how we act. Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good." Romans 2:6-11, as we read a moment ago, said that God will render to each person according to his deeds: to people who by perseverance in doing good, seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give them eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious, who only think about themselves, and don't obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, to them He gives wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation, that's trouble and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but there will be glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. God is not partial, there is no partiality with God.

Many people think they can live as they please and escape judgment; but what we do affects other people. How we act matters to God. Galatians 6:7-8 says, "Do not be deceived, (oh, people will often lie to themselves, that what they do does not matter). Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." If you were to take stock of how you act, would you be living to please yourself or living to please God?

Fourth, we'll be judged by our secrets. In Romans 2:16, Paul speaks of "the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus." We may be able to hide our actions from other people, but we cannot hide them from God. God always knows. First Corinthians 4:5 says, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but you wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God." The Lord Jesus said, "For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light" (Mark 4:22).

Fifth, we'll be judged for failing to do what is right. James 4:17 says, "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and doesn't do it, to him it is sin." If we fail to believe, we'll be lost. The Lord said, "whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18). If we fail to repent, we'll be lost. Again, the Lord said, "I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). The Lord also said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). This is a reference to baptism. Finally, we must remain devoted and faithful to the Lord.

Jesus said, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22). The Lord expects us to be fully committed to Him for a lifetime!

Sixth, we will be judged if we leave God’s teaching for man’s teaching. Paul warned, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8). Paul knew people would not always want the truth, but would rather hear a convenient falsehood. So he said, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and will wander off into myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

You can’t draw close to God unless you’re willing to listen to and follow Him. You can’t expect to be saved if you follow false doctrines. Second John 9 says, “everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” Preaching a false doctrine leads people to believe a lie and have false hope. That’s cruel to the people who believe it, and it is a wicked deed according to that passage.

Sometimes people loudly reply, “Well, Jesus never judged anybody.” It’s true that Jesus certainly loved sinners, and He said, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged” (Matthew 7:1). But Jesus was condemning the unfair judging of the Pharisees. The Lord Jesus also said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). We all make judgments every day about many things. We expect people to obey the laws and we criticize those that don’t. We don’t like being deceived or being cheated. Society judges everything except morality and religion. But we excuse immorality and we excuse heresy, because we think God won’t judge them. We couldn’t be more wrong.

Jesus was full of grace, but He preached repentance. He didn’t stone the woman caught in adultery in John 8, but He told her to “go and sin no more.” The Bible teaches forgiveness, but never without calling people to repent. Second Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” Repentance implies that we cease the wrong and do what is right.

Jesus didn’t come to this earth to leave us where He found us. He came to give us an abundant life and to show us a better life. Repentance is God’s way of saying to us that we can and must change to a life of love, of good works, of blessing others. Romans 5:6-8 says, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus didn’t come to excuse our sin, or to tell us that sin doesn’t matter. He wanted something better for us! He bore the sin penalty that we should have borne. Isaiah 53:5-6 says, “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Jesus didn’t excuse our sins; He knew sin would destroy us. So He went to

the cross to forgive our sins, so that we could live righteous lives. He wanted us to rise above that old sinful life.

When sin is your enemy, you have to take a stand against it. When you do, you're actually showing love toward those who are in sin. Because Jesus loved sinners, He spoke against their sin and offered them forgiveness. Jesus spoke against anger, lying, sexual immorality, greed, false doctrines, and laziness. Jesus condemned disbelief, hypocrisy, slander, and betrayal. The Lord loved us enough to die for us, but He spoke against these things, because He cared for our souls. The Lord Jesus stood so strongly against sin that He said, "if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (Matthew 5:29-30). If you love the Lord and you love people, you'll warn your friends not to live in sin. You will speak about the harmful nature of sin. You'll not only refuse to participate in sin, you'll expose sin for what it is—an enemy of God, and your enemy too.

God hates sin, because He loves you. He sent His Son to die for you, to atone for your sins, so you could be washed from sin and live with Him eternally. We owe God so much. It would be tragic to treat God as if He didn't matter! When we excuse sin, we say to God that we don't care if sin offends Him. We need to wake up and to see how we are destroying and condemning ourselves by thinking sin is somehow obsolete and that God won't judge us for it.

In Isaiah 1:18-20 the Lord says, "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. And if you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." Don't suppose that God will overlook you at the end of time. Get right with God.

God isn't blind or deaf; He sees everything we think and do. Acts 17:30-31 says, "the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." God will indeed hold us accountable for what we do. Hebrews 10:26-27 says, "For if we go on sinning deliberately (willfully) after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries." "It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

We are answerable to God. We'll face God one day either with the help of Christ or without it. Romans 6:23 says, "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." If we refuse the grace of Christ, we'll have to suffer the wages of sin ourselves. If we come humbly, lovingly, and obediently to the Lord, His blood will wash us, make us holy, and justify us. If you are not a Christian, become one. Believe with your heart, repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When you're baptized, the Lord will forgive your sin, cause you to be born again, and make you God's child. Galatians 3:26-27 says, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." To be saved, you must be in Christ. By faith we are baptized into Christ. I urge you to get right today.

## Freedom In Christ

Paul said, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free." Today we'll see how Christ sets us free. Many people, who don't understand our faith, think of Christianity as merely a list of rules telling us what we can't do and what we must do. While there are rules and precepts in Christ, God gave us these instructions to give us freedom, not to ruin our lives. We can't buy a new car without also getting a manual. That manual informs us how to care for the car and how to get the most pleasure and use out of the car. We're grateful for that manual. In the same way, God gave us a soul, and the Bible is God's manual for the soul. He didn't give us this manual to punish us but to provide what we needed so we could be free to enjoy life forever. I'm so thankful to God for the Bible.

People long to be free from painful and humiliating restraints. Prisoners, tired of walls want their freedom; slaves want to be free from their human masters; addicts want to be free from their enslaving habits; people who are ill or infirmed long to be healthy; and students want to finish school so they can be free to pursue their lives. We love the Lord, and our love for the Lord frees us from the things that harm us and gives us the opportunity to serve and bless others. The more we know the Lord, the more we want to be like Him. We freely choose to follow Christ because we love Him, and we know that He loves us.

Our reading today comes from 1 Peter 2:13-17, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."

Galatians 5:1 says, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free." While Christianity is a commitment to Christ, it's also a means of freedom for the soul. Christ came to this earth to give us an abundant life and eternal life. He came to bless us in the present and in the life to come. If you're in Christ, you now have all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. Treasure those blessings.

When we speak of freedom in Christ, we must understand that Christ sets us free from many things that will harm us. When people decide to follow sin, they inevitably fall into ruin. They hurt themselves and usually hurt those they love. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). We might call this an addiction or a habit, but it's really enslavement. Sin is controlling and makes people do things they don't want to do. Paul explained, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me" (Romans 7:14-17).

When people find pleasure in sin, that pleasure leads them to do wicked things that they regret and brings them shame. It controls their thoughts and actions and only leads to ruin. Romans 8:5-8 says, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For

the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Because he had sinned, Paul saw himself as wretched and he longed for the freedom that came in Christ! He said, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25). Maybe you've felt that way, you felt trapped by sin and you longed for forgiveness. Paul wanted to live that righteous life that would please God, and be free from sin. Paul knew sin – not God – but sin – was the real enemy that enslaves us and makes life miserable. The Lord Jesus came to this earth to set us free from sin and to give us peace and hope. He came to show us a better life and a better way of life and to give us the opportunity to live it.

How sad that some Christians return to the very sins from which they were delivered. They've forgotten the price that Jesus paid to free them from sin. They've forgotten how sin traps them, and shames them, and ruins their lives. They let their eyes, their flesh, or their pride lead them away from God and back into misery. They put their souls at great risk. Second Peter 2:20-21 says, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (that is through the word), and they are again entangled in them (that is those defilements) and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than having known it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them." Dear Christian friend, don't let sin back into your life.

The forgiveness and freedom that we have in Christ does more for us than the Old Testament Law could do. Paul told the Jews of Antioch in Pisidia, "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him (that is through Christ) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39).

The book of Galatians tells how some Jewish Christians were trying to bind circumcision and the Law of Moses on the Gentile Christians. Paul wrote, "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified" (Galatians 2:15-16). We find our freedom from sin by faith and obedience to Christ, not by the works of the Law. Galatians 5:6 says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor un-circumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."

The freedom that we have in Christ is not merely freedom from the things that hurt us; it's also a freedom to pursue the things that build us up and bless others. Galatians 5:22-23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." God is at work in our lives to produce some wonderful qualities, and there's no limit to how much of these things we can enjoy and share with others. We are free to pursue these things to our heart's content, knowing they will not only bless our lives but will bless everyone around us.

We have no limit on the amount of God's love that we can show to others. The more we know of the grace and love of God, the more we rejoice and the more we want to share it. Paul prayed that the Christians "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth



and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:18-19). The more we know the love of God, the more thankful we are for it!

Christ’s love leads us to a joy inexpressible and full of glory! There’s no limit to the joy that we know in Christ. In fact, though he was in prison and fearful of losing his life, Paul urged the church, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). Life can give us many miseries, but it cannot snatch from us our joy in Christ, the joy of a home in heaven.

As the Spirit works in our lives through the word, we find peace. The Scriptures are filled with the promises of God in black and white. In Christ, we can live free from worry because we know our Father in heaven provides for us, hears our prayers, forgives our sins, protects us from evil, and gives us an inheritance. We can sleep at night with the assurance that God cares for us and is with us.

When we read of Christ’s patience in Scripture, it leads us to be patient. Patience is the ability to remain emotionally calm and assured in the face of frustration or misfortune and to keep from complaining. We see how Christ endured the cross without taking vengeance, and it gives us the inner strength to endure whatever hostilities we may face.

Because God has been so kind to us, we are free to pursue kindness towards others. We are free to help others in times of trouble, to forgive others, and to give freely of our time and energy to bless others. That’s a wonderful gift. There’s no law against kindness. The Lord Jesus said, “give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure that you use it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).

God’s example of generosity leads us to pursue a life of goodness or generosity. We know that we can never out-give God. Galatians 6:9-10 says, “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

The Spirit, through the Scriptures, also reveals to us the faithfulness of God, which leads us to be faithful. Jesus fought for hours through the pain of the cross, the mocking, and the shame. All of those things happened when He was crucified. The Lord Jesus endured the cross to the end and He never gave up on us. The Lord Jesus said, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). We can count on the Lord, and that assurance leads us to be faithful to Him and to never give up living the Christian life.

Since God is gentle with us, blessing us even when we don’t deserve His blessing, we learn to be gentle with others. Paul said, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). Our loving Father in heaven is the God of all grace, the God of all comfort, and the God of all hope. Because God treated us gently in saving us, we can forgive others when they trespass against us.

Some people think to be self-controlled is to lack freedom, but the truth is that no one can be free who lacks self-control. When people can’t control themselves, their passions enslave them to their desires and their lusts. Addictions enslave, but self-control keeps us out of slavery. Self-control allows us to pursue what is good, to say no to sin, to pursue what is healthy and to stay away from what is unhealthy. That way, we can keep from feeding some evil habit that enslaves us.

The gospel of Christ frees us from sin and frees us to pursue Christian love and service; but to have this freedom, we've got to abide in Christ. Our freedom is in Christ, not outside of Him. The Lord Jesus promised, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). Staying within the words of Christ found in Scripture is how Jesus distinguishes His true disciples from the others.

Let's think just a little bit. Here you have a big train. A train can't go anywhere unless it's on the tracks! The very tracks that confine it are the tracks that make it free, and it can travel for mile after mile and carry heavy loads. In the same way, let's hold fast to Christ; only Jesus has the words of eternal life. When we move away from the teaching of Christ, it's like moving away from those tracks. Whenever we move away from the teachings of Christ, we move away from God. Second John 9 says, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, (the words Jesus gave) he has both the Father and the Son." If we want to have the Father and the Son, we must abide in the teaching. We must hear what the Scripture says and we must follow the scriptures.

Why does this matter? The Lord's words teach the truth, the truth that keeps us free. It keeps us free from false hopes and free from the lies that the devil tells. The words of Christ provide a means for us to be able to tell right from wrong, it gives us a standard where we can distinguish what is real from what is imaginary, and the word of Christ gives us a firm foundation to build our lives on. True freedom comes from staying within the boundaries that God gave to us, from abiding in His word. To go beyond those boundaries does not free us; it just tangles us up in human doctrines. This is why we must examine the word of God and examine ourselves to see if we are abiding in the words of Christ.

The Lord Jesus said, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). I'm so thankful for the Lord's power to set me free from sin and spiritual death. God can give us hope that we can change and become the people that God would have us to be. We don't have to be trapped and enslaved by sin. God gives us something better. Romans 6:16-18 says, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, that you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, you've become slaves of righteousness." Here were some lost slaves of sin who obeyed the Lord Jesus, they were set free from sin, and became the servants of righteousness.

The Lord frees us from misery to set us on a better pathway to the good life of love and service, the pathway to eternal life. You can become a Christian by being united with Christ. To be one with Christ you must put your faith in Him as the Son of God, repent of your sins, confess Him before others, and be baptized into Christ. Galatians 3:26-27 says, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Baptism is that time when those outside of Christ are united with and come into Christ, where His forgiveness and His blessings are. The Lord will wash away your sins when you are baptized according to Acts 22:16 and He'll unite you with Christ according to Romans 6:4-5. Come to the Lord today!

## WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

How would your friends describe you? Would they say you were a good person or a rascal? Today we're asking people to look at themselves to see how they've lived. When life is over, we'll look back at our lives wondering what we've done that mattered. Did we please the Lord or did we please ourselves? Were we a blessing to the people around us or did we bring them trouble? Many spend their entire lives pursuing empty paths, but the one who is faithful to God pursues righteousness. What have you done with your life? What will people remember about you?

Many Christians are content to be Christians in name only. They want to wear the name, but they aren't willing to take their faith seriously. My friend, Steve Higginbotham, recently wrote about some misplaced desires of people today. He said, "We want a Savior, but we don't want a Lord. We want a crown, but we don't want a cross. We want a harvest, but we don't want to sow the seed. We want to go to Heaven, but we won't go to church. We want to grow spiritually, but we don't want to feed on his word. We want Hollywood to 'clean up its act,' but we don't want to stop watching. We want the right to pray, even in school, but we don't want to pray. We want the Ten Commandments posted, but we don't want to live by their moral principles. We want to love God, but we don't want to abhor sin. We want to die the death of the righteous, but we don't want to abandon the lifestyle of the sinner." Steve is right. People want to go to heaven, but they don't live as Christians should. What about you? What have you done with your life?

Our reading today comes from Psalm 15, "O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend; In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt and does not change; He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken."

The Bible gives some interesting assessments of people's lives. For instance, Genesis 5:24 says, "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." We learn from Hebrews 11:5, "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God." Walking with God pleases Him. James 2:23 calls Abraham "the friend of God." Are you God's friend? God said, "I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will" (Acts 13:22). Are you doing all the will of God?

Then, there is the evil King Jehoram who killed all of his brothers with a sword. When he died, 2 Chronicles 21:20 says of him, "And he departed with no one's regret. They buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings." In the New Testament, we find Judas Iscariot, who stole money from the money bag and betrayed the Lord Jesus with a kiss. We also find Demas. Though Demas had once been faithful, 2 Timothy 4:10 says, "For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica." Were you once faithful, and have you fallen away from the Lord?

The Bible teaches that we'll be judged according to our works, whether good or bad. Jesus promised, "For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and

then he will repay each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:27). The Lord Jesus said, “And all the churches will know that I am he who searches the mind and the heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works” (Revelation 2:23). How we live matters. Our works tell what’s in our hearts, and the Lord will judge us by whether we have served Him or not.

The first thing that God looks for in people is whether they believe. Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it’s impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” A faithful Christian believes the gospel and he knows the love of God. His faith is not merely a belief, but is a way of life. He takes Whom he believes and what God says seriously.

There are different levels of faith. Some people believe intellectually, that is, they say God exists and His way is right, but their belief doesn’t influence their behavior. They are believers in their minds but not in their lives. God wants our faith to be deeper than that. He wants us to believe on the involvement level, that is, our faith should impact how we live and our values. We ought to do more than just believe Christ Jesus rose from the dead. We live in obedience to Him, because we understand that He will raise us up one day. We ought to do more than believe that Jesus is Lord; we ought to obey Him as our Lord.

Unless our faith matters enough for us to practice it, it’s not any good. We must act on what we believe. We must move from a dead faith to a living one. James 2:14-16 says, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it doesn’t have works, is dead.” We want a living, active faith that makes a difference in our own lives and blesses the lives of others.

Someone asks, “Well Phil, aren’t we saved by faith alone?” While it’s true that we’re saved by faith, to talk about “faith alone” is to talk about a dead faith. James 2:18-19 says, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Well even the demons believe—and shudder!” Saying that you have faith, but are unwilling to demonstrate that faith makes you no better than the demons who believe so strongly that they shudder at the thought of God. What are you doing with your faith?

James 2:20-24 says, “Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. A person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

When God tested Abraham, Abraham demonstrated his faith by offering his son Isaac upon the altar. Of course, God didn’t allow him to slay his son; God was testing him to see if he would obey Him. Many years earlier, God told Abraham to leave his home and family and go to a strange place. Hebrews 11:8 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Faith obeys! A dead faith talks a good game, but a living faith obeys what it believes.



John the Baptist said, “whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). God never speaks approvingly of a faith that will not obey. The disobedient can expect one day to see the wrath of God. A believer who will not obey will never enjoy God’s grace. Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 says, “when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” God loves everybody, but His grace and favor is extended to those who love and obey Him.

Because of this, we must move away from being spectators to being participants. Some say, “I love Jesus, but I don’t want to be in the church.” The church is the family of Jesus, the body of Christ. If you love and want to be like Jesus, then you must be part of His church. The church was and is His idea and it’s His family. Faith in Christ and worshiping with the church is not like going to a basketball game where we can sit in the stands and watch others on the floor. God expects each of us to sing, to pray, to listen to the Bible, to commune with Him in the Lord’s Supper, and to support the work of the church. Living for God means I am busy producing fruit every day, working for His cause, carrying my cross, sharing the gospel, and blessing the lives of other people. The Lord Jesus said, “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8). Don’t talk your faith, live it, live it out every day.

Ralph Grant in his book, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, told the story of the Franks during the Dark Ages. When the gospel came to Northern Europe, large numbers of these savage tribes of the Franks were being baptized. These people had been warriors for generations, so teaching them the ways of peace was difficult. They were not sure they wanted to give up their savage fighting, so they went into the waters of baptism holding their battle-axes up out of the water. They would say, “This hand has never been baptized!” They were willing to make a commitment to Christ in some things but would not give up their fighting.

Of course, one is either completely baptized, or he’s not really baptized at all. There’s no such thing as baptizing “everything but the hand.” God only accepts us on His terms; and He will not accept anything less than a total commitment. God doesn’t want some parts of you; He wants all of you. This is one reason baptism into Christ is an immersion of the entire person in water; baptism is a total commitment to God. Romans 6:4 says, “Therefore we’ve been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” The whole person is buried and raised with Christ, the whole person has all his sins forgiven, and the whole person rises from the water to walk in newness of life.

We sing the hymn, “All to Jesus I Surrender.” Have you truly surrendered all to the Lord Jesus? Are you totally committed? Listening to the way some Christians talk, I wonder if their tongues were ever baptized? Some continually gossip, and others constantly complain. Some tell dirty jokes, while others take the name of the Lord in vain. Some Christians tell half-truths, and others are given to slander. Taming the tongue is difficult, but becoming a Christian means keeping a close guard on our mouths. James sadly said, “from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way” (James 3:10).

The selfish and evil thinking of some Christians makes you wonder if their minds were ever baptized. Some are full of greed, while others are full of pride. They think little of others and they step on others to get an advantage. Becoming a Christian means putting Christ first, others second, and ourselves last. Philippians 2:3-4 says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Considering what some people watch on television or at the movies, you'd wonder if their eyes and their ears were baptized? Some Christians have grown callous to sinful words, to nudity, to violence, to anger, and to all kinds of immoral behavior. Years ago, people expected the movie industry to maintain some moral standards. If a movie contained ungodly language or ungodly behavior, people walked out and told the theater managers they didn't care for such indecent movies. Today, one can hardly go to a movie or watch a television program that doesn't have indecent language or behavior. What are you letting into your heart?

How some people treat others makes you wonder if their hearts were baptized? Some people simply don't know how to be patient with others or how to forgive. They seem to have forgotten the words of our Lord, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Many people live with anger, fear, or hatred in their hearts. Paul said, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32).

How are you living? Do you follow God? Whenever someone looks at your life, are you a good person, or are you a rascal?

God sets the bar high for those who would follow Him. The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26-27). God expects us to love Him more than anything else, and to put Him first.

Someone asks, "Well Phil, aren't we saved by grace?" Yes, we are saved by the grace of God; and that grace is a precious gift that can't be earned. We can't obligate God to save us. But because the gift is precious, God examines our lives to see whether we have genuinely received the gift or took it for granted. The Lord Jesus out of love paid a very high price to save you and me from sin. It matters to Him how we receive that gift. If we care so little for Him that we ignore His teaching and live as we want to, why should it surprise you or me, if the gift that we neglected was lost? The Lord will judge you and me according to our response to His grace. Have you lived in a way that shows that you love the Lord?

To enjoy the gift of salvation, we must lovingly respond to His grace by faith, by repenting of our sins, by confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized into Christ. When you love the Lord, you don't argue with the Lord about what to do but simply obey Him. Faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin. We obey because we believe, and our obedience reveals our faith. Acts 2:38 still says, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Won't you do that today?

## Be Wise

When people begin thinking wisely, their lives begin to change dramatically for the better. Today we're going to look in the Bible to see how God wants us to think. We know God's Word reveals God's wisdom and His character. God's way is pure and holy. God's way is full of love and kindness. God's Word leads us to forgiveness and to an inheritance in heaven. God's Word teaches us how to enjoy eternal life. The wisdom of God, the morality of God, and the ethics of God, can be found in His Divine Word. We only cheat ourselves if we don't study and follow God's teachings found in the Bible.

Wisdom is considered by many to be simply the art of learning how to succeed in life. The real essence of wisdom is spiritual, for life is more than just living by a set of rules and being rewarded in some physical manner. Undoubtedly, wisdom comes from God. Solomon said, "For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6). Wisdom involves observation and instruction. It really begins with God and one's faith in Him as Lord and Savior.

Solomon said, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Now, fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). The difference between a wise person and the foolish person is how they understand God and His Word. The Bible says, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28). God knows men intimately. He knows the good and the evil that's in them; He sees what blesses and what curses. It just makes sense to listen to Him.

Our reading today comes from Psalm 1, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season. And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish."

Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs as a father writing to his son. He wanted to instruct him how to avoid moral and spiritual problems and to be successful in life. If you want to be wise, read the book of Proverbs again and again. Proverbs 1:1-7 says: "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth - Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." When people give respect to God in every aspect of their lives that's the beginning of wisdom.

The Bible pictures wisdom as if she were a person crying out to people; and she yearns to be heard. Proverbs 1:20-33 says: "Wisdom shouts in the street, She lifts her voice in the square; At the head of the noisy streets she cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings: 'How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Turn to my reproof,

Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. Because I called and you refused, and I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; And you neglected all my counsel, And did not want my reproof; I also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, When your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. Then they'll call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me, Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof. So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way And be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them. But he who listens to me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil.”

The Bible links foolishness to godlessness. Psalm 14:1 says, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” The fool doesn’t so much deny God as he ignores God’s existence. He doesn’t care if God exists or what God says. He intends to live the way he pleases regardless of what God says, because he’s chosen to live without God. Isaiah explains, “For a fool speaks nonsense, and his heart inclines toward wickedness: To practice ungodliness and to speak error against the Lord” (Isaiah 32:6). In the Bible a fool is any person who acts like there is no God or thinks God’s commandments make no difference.

We think of a fool as someone who lacks intelligence or common sense. But when the Bible speaks of a fool, it’s not speaking of a mentally deficient person. Rather it’s speaking in a moral or religious sense. Foolishness is a respect issue rather than an intellectual one. This failure may come from a rebellious or insolent spirit, a quick temper, acting impetuously, or insisting on one’s own way. Proverbs 22:15 says: “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; and the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.” Foolishness is often characterized by an obstinate person who insists on making choices that lead to destruction.

This kind of fool refuses to learn and to practice what is right. He fails to fear or respect the Lord, because he thinks he knows better than God. He closes his heart against God, against morality, and against reason. Fear of God is a proper respect and awe for God. It regards God as God and gives Him the honor and praise that are due to His name. This relationship provides the necessary foundation for thinking about life, about behavior, and about attitudes. The basic choices we make in our moral and spiritual lives reveal our wisdom or they reveal our foolishness. Proverbs 12:15 says, “the way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.” Jeremiah 10:23 says, “I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it’s not in man who walks to direct his steps.” The fool won’t listen to God.

In the New Testament, a fool fails to perceive reality correctly because he or she has failed to take God and His will seriously or to see things from God’s perspective. Jesus called the Pharisees fools for focusing on externals and ignoring their character; they were warped with greed and wickedness. Jesus tells of the foolish rich farmer who had laid up possessions on earth but wasn’t rich toward God. He only thought of himself and ignored God. Fools distort life and they ignore their accountability to God. Jesus called the Pharisees blind fools for their complete insensitivity to God’s values. They would strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.

Job 28:12-28 asks the question, “But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its value, Nor is it found in the land of the living. The



deep says, 'It is not in me'; And the sea says, 'It's not with me.' Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, Nor can silver be weighed as its price. It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, or in precious onyx, or sapphire. Gold or glass cannot equal it, Nor can it be exchanged for articles of fine gold. Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned; And the acquisition of wisdom is above that of pearls. The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, Nor can it be valued in pure gold. Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living, And concealed from the birds of the sky. Abaddon and Death say, 'With our ears we have heard a report of it.'"

Job answers his question about where is wisdom found: He says, "God understands its way, And He knows its place. For He looks to the ends of the earth, And He sees everything under the heavens. When He imparted weight to the wind, And meted out waters by measure, When He set a limit for the rain. And a course for the thunderbolt, Then He saw it and declared it; He established it and searched it out. And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'"

We must search the Scriptures for God's revealed will. The Bible says, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). Wisdom comes from God; it's not like the shrewd trickery of men. Only by looking at life from God's revealed word can we avoid those foolish notions about life's meaning. These distorted notions cause people to live destructive and painful lives. Foolishness causes pain to the one who is foolish and to those who meet him or her.

God's wisdom matters. Many read everything but the Bible. They know movie stars, athletes, and television programs; but they don't know what God wills for their lives. Proverbs 2:1-12 says: "My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom from His mouth; and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of His saints. He said, then you'll understand righteousness and justice and equity, you'll understand every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways."

The Bible is God's gift of wisdom for us all. It will bless us if we take the time to read and study it. Psalm 19:7 says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." True wisdom is a gift from God to those who ask for it. God promised, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Every day that we spend time with God, listening to his word and praying to him is a day that we'll grow wiser. We'll make better choices, we'll learn how to avoid evil, and we'll grow to love God more.

Jeremiah spoke the words of God in Jeremiah 9:23-24: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,’ declares the Lord.” Real wisdom is in knowing God and His will for our lives. Nothing is more valuable! Not earthly wisdom, not riches, not might. Come to know God, and true, spiritual wisdom will come with it!

Proverbs 3:13-18 says: “Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.”

Some time ago, a man approached a preacher after worship and said, “You Christians are all brainwashed.” The preacher replied, “Friend, everyone is brainwashed to some degree. Everybody fills his brains with something. The important thing is that true Christians choose what we want to wash our brains with.” We choose God’s love, God’s wisdom, and God’s truth. Those things wash away lies, errors in thinking, selfishness, and hatefulness. They leave us with good will and good intentions. They build us up and make us authentic. We belong to God, and He is in our thoughts and deeds. We ask, “What does God will?” “How does God want us to think?” “How can we be like Jesus?” “What is loving?” Proverbs 30:5 says, “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.” We know this to be true.

Solomon said, “Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding” (Proverbs 23:23). If you wish to be wise, humble your heart and listen to God’s Word. Nothing else will bless your life the way the Bible will. That old book that our grandmothers read is still true and still meaningful; it still separates the wise from the foolish. It still contains the way to eternal life and the best way to live today. It teaches what is right and good; it leads to peace and love. We need the wisdom, the guidance, the correction, and the promises found in the Word of God.

The Bible is God’s revealed will, God’s wisdom, and God’s gift to us. This book, no matter what you might first think, is what God will use to examine your life at the end of time. Buy the truth, know the truth, love the truth, and obey the truth. To become a Christian you must put your trust in God out of love. You must believe that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God, who died for your sins, was buried, and on the third day rose again to be the Lord of all. Out of faith and love, you must repent of your sins. You can’t love God and keep on living in sin. Love means giving all that sinful life up in order to take up your cross and follow Him. Along with faith, love, and repentance, the Lord asks you to be baptized. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 16:16, “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.” Won’t you respond to the Lord’s teaching? Today is the best day for you to become a Christian, and we are praying that you will.